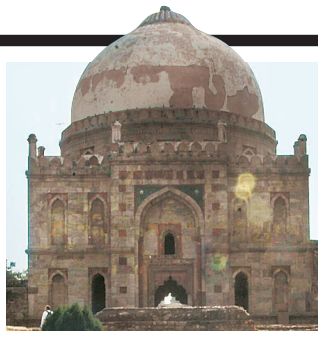


A peep at the garden's history

The tomb of Mohammad Shah, also known as the Mubarak Khan Ka Gumbad, is one of the five best known monuments at Lodi Garden. It is also the earliest tomb in the garden. It was built in 1443-44 by Alauddin Alam Shah, in memory of Mohammed Shah, the last ruler of the Sayyid dynasty (1414-1451)



90

acres is the total area on which Lodi Garden is built



Sheesh Gumbad gets its name from the blue glazed tiles that adorn its exterior. It belongs to the Lodi dynasty period (1451-1526) and contains eight graves

By Archana in New Delhi

BUILT around the tombs of sultans whom history has consigned to its footnotes, and once named after the wife of a non-descript viceroy, Lodi Garden has been an enduring favourite of morning walkers, picnickers and lovebirds who leave their marks on the walls of the historical monuments and on the Hawaiian palm trees.

That haven of status statements, power powwows and romantic dreams is turning 75 this Saturday.

Lodi Garden's romance with power started in 1936 when the wife of the then viceroy of British India, the Marquess of Willingdon (after whom Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital was originally named), came upon this patch of land at what was then Khairpur village and instantly fell in love with its landscape.

Marie Adelaide Freeman Thomas, or Lady Willingdon, commissioned a garden to be developed where the village was and its inhabitants were bundled off to a place near Panipat, 200km away. Lady Willingdon Park was eventually inaugurated on April 9, 1936. But as luck would have it, Lady Willingdon didn't get to enjoy the fruits of her labour for long as her



PHOTOS: JYOTI KAPOOR

COSYING UP TO NATURE: The garden is a favourite hangout among the city's youth as it offers a respite from the hustle and bustle.

A walk down memory lane as city's green belt celebrates 75 years

LODI GARDEN IN PLATINUM CLUB

husband was recalled to London soon after. His last day in office as the viceroy was April 18, 1936.

Suhas Borke, founder-member of The Green Circle of Delhi, a voluntary group of eco-activists, shares the curious legend associated with the departure of the Willingdons. "Even now the descendants of those displaced villagers come to the garden every Thursday to pay respects at the mosque. They believe it was the curse of the patron saint of the village that was responsible for the departure of the Willingdons from Delhi," Borke says.

The Green Circle of Delhi is celebrating the 75th anniversary of the garden with a discussion titled 'Green Lung and Heritage Precinct of New Delhi' at the India International Centre (IIC) at 6.30 p.m. on Saturday. Earlier that morning, Deeba Sobti, who teaches history at Modern School, Barakhamba Road, will conduct a heritage walk through the garden.

The impeccably landscaped garden, which is open to the public till 8 p.m. every day, covers swathes of history within its 90 acres. The dozen monuments on its premises date back to the 15th and 16th centuries, from the reigns of the Sayyids and the Lodis to the time of Emperor Akbar (1556-1605). The garden also has a glass house designed by Joseph Allen Stein, the American architect who not only re-landscaped the area in 1968, but also designed the adjacent India



BIRDS OF FEATHER: Ducks are a familiar sight in the garden.

International Centre.

With such an amazing green cover, it's not a surprise that this necropolis has shaped up into one of the city's best-known gardens. It is home to over 200 varieties of trees — the tallest being the Narikel, the 70ft Buddha's Coconut tree. These trees provide refuge to 44 varieties of birds, from the Indian grey hornbill to the Maratha woodpecker, and the lake within its boundaries plays host to about 80 ducks, many of whom were rescued by C.L. Paul, a retired customs officer, from the INA Market. Borke also lists the sky above

the garden as one of its five "core elements". He quotes the poem by Octavio Paz (1914-1998), the Mexican Nobel Prize-winning poet and author who was his country's ambassador to India from 1962 to 1968, wrote on the garden on his last visit to IIC — *The black, pensive, dense / domes of the mausoleums / suddenly shot birds / into the unanimous blue.* The garden will continue to inspire poets and power brokers alike, its bushes will continue to be rocked by lovers, and it will be impossible to imagine Delhi without the green magnetism of the Lodi Garden.

Lodi Garden was inaugurated on April 9, 1936 on a plot of land which was then home to the inhabitants of Khairpur village



PICNIC SPOT: It is a perfect backdrop for spending time with family.